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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a 1993-94 pilot program in Memphis (Tennessee) that was developed to increase the number of minority students prepared for, matriculating to, and graduating from postsecondary institutions. The communitywide partnership of institutions that implemented the program is described, along with the needs assessment commissioned by the partnership. The program grew from the participation of the University of Memphis and Shelby State College in the Ford Foundation's City-side Transfer Project. This initiative was expanded to include LeMoyne-Owen College and the Memphis City School system in the Memphis Center for Urban Partnerships (MCUP). MCUP selected one area of Memphis as a pilot area and began work with five elementary, secondary, and vocational schools. A needs assessment identified areas to be addressed in a plan for systemic change. Restructuring is beginning, and major program goals are being defined for different educational levels. Strategies for improving urban learning environments are being created and are grounded in an ecological model and guided by the belief that community resources must be mobilized to support school restructuring. (Contains 22 references.) (SLD)

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Design of a Learning Community for Urban Learners:

The Memphis Plan

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Introduction

This paper describes a 1993-94 pilot program in Memphis, Tennessee, developed to increase the number of minority students prepared for, matriculating to, and graduating from postsecondary institutions. Information is provided regarding (a) the community-wide partnership of institutions which was created to implement this program, (b) the Spring 1993 needs assessment commissioned by the partnership, and (c) the conceptual model used in planning systemic educational reform within the partnership's target community as well as specific projects piloted in 1993-94.

In 1983, the Ford Foundation began a series of initiatives to assist two-year urban institutions in better preparing students for transfer and graduation from four-year institutions. Many of the programs which were developed through Ford Foundation sponsorship have since been institutionalized, and others have spawned adaptation. Common to all these initiatives was the goal of increasing the number or urban -- and in many cases, minority -- students receiving associate and baccalaureate degrees. The National Center for Urban Partnerships was the result of one such initiative.

In 1989, the Ford Foundation and FIPSE funded six city-wide teams -- in the Bronx, Miami, Oakland, Phoenix, San Antonio, and Seattle -- to mobilize those communities for the educational advancement of urban minority students. Teams were to establish executive or planning committees that included representatives from businesses, community-based organizations, and government, as well as from local schools and colleges. These executive committees met to develop strategic plans for their cities, and smaller working committees began to implement projects consistent with those plans.

Initial results from the six cities were promising. On the basis of these results, the Ford Foundation awarded funding to the Networks Project, which was developed by a coalition of the six teams and which is now responsible for assisting approximately 15 city teams and allocating additional awards to some of the more advanced teams. To ensure a wide spectrum of

participation, Networks invited the National League of Cities and the U.S. Conference of Mayors to serve as co-sponsors of the project. In Fall 1991, Bronx Community College and the City University of New York underscored their commitment to the project by establishing a home for it, the National Center for Urban Partnerships (NCUP), on the Bronx campus.

Cities invited to join the NCUP consortium are asked to commit to four tasks:

- Teams will designate a leader responsible for overseeing team activities.
- Teams will be represented by top-level representatives from schools, colleges, government, business, and community-based organizations.
- Teams will develop strategic plans to help significant numbers of underserved, urban students prepare for and attain postsecondary degrees.
- Teams will participate in agreed-upon data gathering and be involved in all consortium activities.

Other than its expectation that teams will commit to these four tasks, NCUP maintains no rigid guidelines or preconceptions of how partnerships must be configured. It is crucial, however, that all teams' rosters of participants be characterized by inclusiveness and diversity.

In addition to this conceptual and programmatic freedom, NCUP is remarkable in at least three ways. First, the focus of the program is not on specific activities but rather on systemic changes which will increase the number of under-represented students receiving postsecondary degrees. Second, NCUP recognizes that an extended period of time is needed to bring about the desired systemic change; thus, NCUP teams are funded through a series of stages for up to ten years. Finally, once accepted into NCUP, a team does not compete with other teams for financial support. Each team conceptualizes a long-range plan in Stage I, then serially requests support for activities as the team is ready to implement them.

As of March 1994, 16 cities have agreed to these terms, have been visited by small teams representing NCUP, and have applied for Stage I awards: Bronx, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Memphis, Miami, Minneapolis, Newark, Phoenix, Queens, Richmond, Rochester, San Antonio, Santa Ana, and Seattle.

The Memphis Center for Urban Partnerships (MCUP)

As a result of their participation in the Ford Foundation's City-wide Transfer Project, The University of Memphis (then Memphis State University) and Shelby State Community College were invited to form a Memphis team and submit a Stage I proposal to NCUP. To more effectively address NCUP's goals, the Memphis team expanded to include two other institutions -- LeMoyne-Owen College, a private historically Black college in Memphis, and the Memphis City School system. These four sponsoring institutions selected a broad-based team to lead the Memphis partnership which was then visited by representatives from NCUP during Spring 1992.

Mission and Goals

In response to the counsel of NCUP representatives, the Memphis team formed the Memphis Center for Urban Partnerships (MCUP) and established a mission -- to serve as a catalyst in providing access, resources, and opportunities to students so that they might realize their potential and achieve success by means of increased college preparedness, matriculation, retention and graduation from postsecondary institutions. Five goals were also established:

- To develop and maintain a formal structure for MCUP operations including a team leader and necessary office support systems.
- To develop and maintain a comprehensive planning process that includes a continuing community assessment process designed to identify short, intermediate, and long-range activities.
- To develop and maintain collaborative relationships with current programs, projects, and activities in the community that complement and supplement MCUP goals.
- To support and develop projects, activities, and processes which fosters the success of at-risk precollege students and African-American postsecondary students in attaining associate and baccalaureate degrees.
- To monitor the success of program participants and evaluate the effectiveness of MCUP efforts in bringing about systemic change.

During Stage I (1992-1993), MCUP established a Board of Directors, developed bylaws, hired an executive director, set up an office, conducted a needs assessment, and developed plans for program implementation in 1993-94 (Stage II). MCUP's plan for bringing about systemic change was designed to reflect the spirit and thrust of existing local reform plans, particularly those

developed by Memphis 2000, Shelby County Inter-faith, and Memphis City Schools. Thematically, the plan focuses on helping Memphis evolve into a learning community. The major elements of the plan are:

• Image. To change Memphis into a learning community dedicated to global awareness and competitiveness with a strong, positive sense of "community" which values and provides supportive and safe learning environments. Image is seen as both a micro- and macro-issue. Individual learners and all citizens of Memphis must be nurtured and their self-esteems affirmed and developed. Respecting, supporting, and affirming learning and learners must be a Memphis priority.

• Success. To increase the number of underserved students successfully completing both secondary and postsecondary programs of study.

• Transition Points. To identify and address systemic change in key transition points in the Memphis educational system and community.

• Collaborative, Process-Oriented Change. To develop the "means" rather than the "ends" necessary to affect systemic change in the community and its educational system.

• Educational Success Development Program. To provide motivation, training, and resources to "change agents" such as parents, volunteers, and educational professionals in order to enhance their ability to effectively and efficiently serve the needs and aspirations of the Memphis learning community.

• Research and Assessment. To collect, analyze, and interpret data requisite for evaluating the impact of activities and effectively supporting systemic change.

Determination of the Target Community

The MCUP Board of Directors decided to select one geographic area of Memphis as a pilot community. Lessons learned and programs/services developed in reforming the schools of this community could later be transferred to the entire school system and the Memphis community as a whole.

In selecting the community, the MCUP Board asked the school system to nominate communities for consideration as a pilot community. The school system nominated the Frayser community because in that geographical area no group had claimed guardian/sponsorship, no community organization existed, no special initiatives existed, violence was increasing, and academic performance in the schools was low. The school system's representative to the MCUP Board developed a profile of the schools within Frayser, and Board members also visited the community, touring each school and talking with each school's principal. Based on this review, the Board decided to begin work with one K-6 and one 7-12 school. When an influential citizen learned which schools had been selected, he urged the Board to include two additional schools; thus, another K-6 school and a 7-12 school were added. Shortly after the beginning of the school year and shortly before MCUP's first workshop for teachers, the Board received a request for participation from the principal of the vocational-technical center which serves students from the two selected high schools. The Board talked with all five principals, considered the programmatic implications, and accepted the vocational-technical center as a participating MCUP school.

The community selected by MCUP and MCS is a geographical area of Memphis bordered on the west and south by the Mississippi and Wolf Rivers. Known as Frayser, the area was annexed from Shelby County in the 1950s. However, several factors associated with the community's history, its demographics, and its geographic location have inhibited it from becoming fully integrated into the City of Memphis. Traditionally, residents were European-American blue-collar workers employed by major industrial firms located in the area. During the 1970s, several of these plants closed and the community was unable to attract new employers or rectify its resulting economic crisis. Simultaneously, in the early 1970s the community was impacted by school desegregation and the creation of school satellite zones for court-order bussing. The community experienced widespread "white flight," and homes and apartment complexes became available for new residents, primarily members of ethnic minorities. Student demographics changed dramatically during this period, and larger percentages of at-risk minority

students are now being served by the schools. In addition to at-risk students living in the community, the area schools also serve a large number of students transported from low-income areas of the inner city. An interstate highway built in the 1980s in the Wolf River flood plains serves as a physical barrier which calls attention to the separation between this community and Memphis at large.

The five MCUP pilot sites are located in the older portion of Frayser. Two elementary schools, grades K-6, have a combined enrollment of around 1000 students, approximately half of whom are members of ethnic minorities and over 80% of whom are eligible for free or reduced lunches. Each elementary school shares a campus with a secondary school, grades 7-12. Around 1500 students are enrolled in the secondary schools, with over half belonging to an ethnic minority. The dropout rate in grades 9-12 is more that 50%. Student mobility rates in these four schools range between 35% to 60%. The vocational technical center which serves those high schools enrolls around 450 students.

Spring 1993 Needs Assessment

The Spring 1993 needs assessment of the Frayser community and its schools consisted of three major inquiries: (a) identification of demographic trends between 1980 and 1990, (b) analysis of educational needs and problems reflected in the schools, and (c) status profiles of the three cooperating postsecondary institutions.

Demographic Trends, 1980-1990

A comparison of 1980 and 1990 United States Census data for the target community indicated that during the 1980s the community's racial composition shifted from being predominantly European-American to being almost equally African-American and European-American. By 1990, aging European-Americans and relatively youthful African-Americans were the largest population groups. The educational attainment of African-Americans became more bimodal during the 1980s. A smaller percent had not completed high school, and a larger percent had earned college credit; however, the number of African-American children in poverty increased

88.6% during the 1980s, and the number of African-American families in poverty increased 41.8%. Unemployment rates of African-Americans also rose during the decade as did the number of single-mother households. Employment rates of 16-19 year olds of both races decreased during the decade. The number of children enrolled in preprimary education also decreased. In summary, while the number of children potentially at risk increased, social supports such as preprimary education and employment opportunities for teenagers decreased (Nunnery & Bhaireddy, 1993).

Educational Assessment

As part of a needs assessment of schools selected to be 1993-94 MCUP pilot sites, a field study of the schools was planned and implemented in March 1993. The purpose of the study was to obtain perceptions of students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and community representatives in the Frayser community. The study sought to identify programs, practices, and attitudes which facilitated or inhibited students from enrolling in two- and four-year colleges and successfully completing postsecondary education (Butler, 1993).

Perceptual information was obtained using focus group methodology. More than 400 individuals -- students in grades 5-12, teachers, parents, and administrators in four schools and persons representing civic, corporate, social, and religious organizations in the community -- participated in the focus groups. Participants were requested to share impressions of school programs, school-community relations, future educational plans, factors that supported or hindered academic performance, reasons that high school students drop out, and hindrances which might interfere with students successful completion of college degrees. An important goal of the focus groups was to learn how respondents talked about the phenomena of interest. Additional information was obtained from archival files of the school district and the postsecondary institutions.

Impressions, perceptions, and recommendations were reported in four major categories: (a) School Learning Environments, (b) Home-School-Community Relationships, (c) Student Educational Aspirations and Planning for College / College-School Relationships, and (d) Selected

Programs in the Schools.

School learning environments. While elementary school learning environments were viewed positively by teachers, parents, students, and the community, secondary schools were viewed less positively: no advanced placement courses; limited college-oriented course offerings; deficit views of self reported by many students; students' pro-work, anti-college orientation; problems of school order and safety; low teacher expectations of students; and teacher frustration with students' apathy, absenteeism, and failure to become active, independent, and self-motivated learners. Secondary students readily admitted that they avoided full responsibility as students, had poor study habits and test-taking skills, and possessed little information regarding career options or plans for pursuing postsecondary education. Numerous indicators confirmed that many students at all grade levels were not achieving mastery of basic academic skills and did not have high levels of educational aspiration; these indicators include standardized achievement scores which were consistently lower than the norms for the system and the state, high dropout rates, and the infrequency of graduates' enrollment in college or successful completion of postsecondary education. Schools provided students with few role models from the community. For example, assembly programs had been discontinued as a result of student misbehavior. Teachers and administrators reported that they were not able to take full advantage of the educational resources of the Memphis community. Student work responsibilities and teen pregnancies were found to be important factors contributing to high dropout rates. In addition, many motivated and high performing middle and senior high students had transferred out of district to optional schools and other students said they too would transfer if transportation became available.

Consistently high teacher professionalism was found in the elementary sites. However, secondary teachers reported a range of responses regarding their professionalism and motivation to assist students in learning. One high school teacher reported, "students are not motivated, so why should I be?" Some teachers reported that it was up to parents to motivate students. Personnel at the school sites appeared to expect school system personnel to solve problems at the sites and did

not appear to consider addressing the problems locally.

High school students, in particular, conveyed anxieties about their chances of success outside their immediate school-community contexts and expressed concerns that current good performance in school would not result in later success. They readily cited examples of recent graduates who had performed well in high school but who had failed in college courses. Students also reported being isolated and separated from the cultural and social dimensions of the Memphis community. Students, teacher, and parents consistently articulated a tradition reflecting a culturally deficit model. In the words of one teacher, "student views are narrow; they live in a bubble. We need to get kids to believe in themselves."

Home-school-community relationships. Strong school-parent-community collaborations were not found in the schools, and few educational support or enrichment activities were available to the children or youth after school hours, on weekends, or during the summer. Generally, positive inter-group relations were reported to exist in the schools and community. The inclusion of satellite zones in some schools was found to contribute to problems in obtaining parent involvement and cooperation in school initiatives. Participants reported that many students lacked strong home support systems, missed school in order to fulfill home responsibilities such as caring for elderly relatives or children, or held full- or part-time jobs in order to obtain personal funds or to contribute to family financial resources.

Student educational aspirations and planning for college/college-school relationships. In regard to information about postsecondary opportunities, students reflected limited knowledge regarding career options in high-tech and service professions and reported that they had not been informed of fee waiver possibilities, tuition and boarding costs, grants, loans, and fellowships. Students often did not associate college study with careers or possess information about programs at various area colleges. Few students interviewed had been on a college campus. Students reported that teachers did discuss specific features of college: how difficult it was, how much time must be spent in the library, the high incidence of uncaring professors, the large size of the classes,

and college faculties' willful embarrassment of students. In the group interviews, students had difficulty remembering anything positive which teachers had reported about college. While student athletes knew the colleges which coaches had attended, students seldom knew what colleges their favorite teachers had attended, or even if they had attended college. The typical student belief, in many cases echoed by faculty, was that college was appropriate only for the academically talented high school student or the student athlete. On-going efforts to motivate students to aspire to college though school-wide coordinated efforts were not present in the schools. Area colleges and universities had little, if any, involvement in the schools; college recruitment was primarily associated with student athletes.

Selected programs in the schools. While several programs were found in the schools which addressed leadership development, exploration of career options, and postsecondary educational opportunities, only a limited number of students were involved.

Higher Education Partners

Each of the three higher education institutions collaborating in the Memphis Urban Partnerships Project is a distinct and unique member of the local higher education community.

LeMoyne-Owen College. LeMoyne-Owen College is a private, church-related, historically Black college founded shortly after the Civil War. LeMoyne-Owen, the oldest of the three partner colleges, serves a student population that is 100% African-American. The College has remained small over the years; in the last five years, its student population has varied between 1000 and 1200 students. As a historically Black institution with strong community roots and a distinctive mission to serve the African-American student, it offers many of the virtues of a small liberal arts college environment. Its primary focus is undergraduate education. Like many small private colleges, LeMoyne-Owen is far more expensive than local public institution alternatives. Yet, as an United Negro College Fund (UNCF) charter institution, LeMoyne-Owen endeavors to keep its tuition low.

The University of Memphis. The University of Memphis is a comprehensive, doctoral-

granting university centrally located within an urban population of approximately one million persons. It is the area's largest institution of higher education, serving approximately 20,000 students, of whom only 10% are housed in campus residences. The largeness of its size and the comprehensive character of its diverse programs create many opportunities for community members who wish to pursue higher education. The public base of funding for the university assures reasonably low tuitions which continue to attract large numbers of both European-American (77%) and African-American (19%) students. A very high proportion of all students come from the immediate area: 77% are county residents. While the institution is an aspiring research university, it remains a largely local and urban higher education setting with significant responsibilities to contribute its many strengths and resources to the surrounding community.

Shelby State Community College. Shelby State Community College, the youngest of the three partner institutions, is recognized as an important member of the higher education community in Memphis, offering a point of open access for local students seeking postsecondary opportunities. As a two-year institution offering vocational certificate and licensure programs as well as academic and vocational associate degrees, Shelby State represents the multiple missions and roles of a comprehensive community college. It offers small classes, an accessible entry point to higher education, a strong remedial and developmental function, the lowest tuition structure in the immediate area, and a stance of continuous and flexible responsiveness to community needs. Multiple campus and community sites provide formal programs, continuing education courses, and public service activities. Shelby State's total student population is close to 7000, with 55% of students in career degree and certificate programs, 19% in university-parallel transfer degree programs, another 11% who describe themselves as degree-seeking but who are undecided, and another 15% enrolled but not seeking a degree. With its main facilities in an inner-city Memphis campus, Shelby State has succeeded in attracting an overall student population that is 54% African-American and 44% European-American. But its student population is not easy to retain, track, or graduate. As a place where a student might begin postsecondary study, it is not necessarily where

students complete programs or degrees. Its unique nature as the community's most fully open door into higher education must be understood in relation to many contextual factors that make Shelby State also something of a revolving door.

Assessment of partner institutions. Approximately 130 students from the three partner institutions participated in discussions that used an adaptation of focus group methodology. Most students were African-American. Classifications of the student interviewees ranged from freshman to senior. Group discussions were generally one to two hours in length and structured to allow for free responses from students.

According to student responses, financial aid and financial issues remain major deterrents to recruitment and retention of African-American students in higher education in Memphis. The actual cost of higher education, costs of living associated with college attendance, or the need to work to supplement the household budget prevents significant numbers of African-American students from attending and persisting in attending college.

Other factors identified as contributing to the difficulties that African-American students encounter when seeking to attend and remain in college include:

(1) Lack of understanding of what college requires of them, primarily in trying to balance responsibilities of work, family and education.

(2) Lack of information on college admission procedures and lack of access to information.

(3) Lack of encouragement from secondary school teachers caused by an apparent lack of enthusiasm or willingness on the part of teachers to discuss their own college experiences or to discuss postsecondary educational options with students.

(4) General lack of guidance regarding college admission processes and procedures, the relationship of high school education courses to college acceptance, and the processes for identifying and applying for financial aid in college.

(5) Other influential background factors such as the attitudes of parents or peers and the

diversity of social and cultural environments in which African-American students live prior to college attendance.

(6) Perceptions of barriers to education based on prior academic attainment or the climate of institutional support services (e.g., formidable performance criteria, perception of hostility, inaccessibility of faculty and administrators). (Faith and Scipio, 1993)

Summary

Overall, the needs assessment indicated several major areas of need that might be addressed through MCUP goals and activities. These were:

School learning environments. School environments are not learner-oriented. Secondary schools especially are characterized by student apathy, low teacher and student academic expectations, poor study and test-taking skills, high absenteeism and dropout rates, poor school order, and inadequate safety. Low test scores indicate that many students are not mastering the basic skills.

Home-school-community relationships. Home-school-community relationships are almost non-existent. There are low parent involvement and support of schooling and low school-community collaboration. Because schools are isolated from the neighborhood and separated from the larger Memphis community, the school has access to few positive role models.

Student educational aspirations and planning; college-school relationships. Students, parents, and teachers have low educational aspirations. The curriculum is not college-oriented, few students attend college, there is very little college-school contact, and students have limited knowledge about career options.

Special programs in the schools. Few school-based programs, such as mentoring, enrichment services, or extracurricular activities, provide support for students' academic development or planning for the future.

The information from these major areas of need provided the basis for MCUP's plan of systemic reform. That is, MCUP's strategy is to focus on transforming schools as cultural

systems (norms, beliefs, expectations). Plans are being made to develop a support system that will assist school and community leaders in restructuring the schools. MCUP believes this approach to systemic reform is contextually appropriate and timely because state and district developments support this undertaking: (a) restructuring of high schools will begin in 1994-95 in accordance with Tennessee's new high school policy; (b) other state initiatives include the 21st Century schools legislation, site-based decision making, standards setting, and implementation of authentic assessment; and (c) the participating school district began implementation of school improvement planning in 1993-94. Reforms supported by Memphis 2000, a part of the Education 2000 legislation recently passed by the U.S. Congress, also add support to the systemic restructuring of urban schools.

MCUP Conception of Systemic Educational Reform

Memphis Center for Urban Partnerships (MCUP) seeks to develop and implement programs to enhance the academic success of at-risk K-12 public school students and African-American postsecondary students. In order to accomplish this broad goal, the Partnership is committed to designing and implementing strategies that will contribute to systemic changes in urban schools and community. Changes sought are associated with cultures, structures, processes, and persons linked within ecologically holistic systems. The model adapted for use in planning the Partnership's programs, management structure, and assessment is the ecological systems model developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). In this model, microsystems are defined as social contexts and relationships that affect individual life on a daily basis: families, classrooms, workplaces. The mesosystem is comprised of relationships and networks that connect various microsystems: governing structures and policies at the national, state, and school district levels; national, regional, and state economic, cultural, and political dimensions; neighborhood and community demographics; and school/community traditions and expectations.

MCUP project planning, implementation, and evaluation strategies are designed to target cultural systems and individuals grouped into four levels:

- Level I - State system of education; school district; urban community; NCUP/MCUP
- Level II - K-12 schools, postsecondary institutions
- Level III - K-12 classes and postsecondary classes
- Level IV - K-12 and postsecondary students; school/college/university personnel; parents and primary caregivers; community representatives.

Each level is recognized as containing cultures, interaction patterns, and outcomes that influence other systems and outcomes. Interventions are designed to address problems and foster changes within and across levels. The microsystems of schools, classes, and individuals are placed in Levels II, III, and IV. At Level I, national, state, and school district developments (mesosystems) influencing the schools are identified and assessed in terms of impact. MCUP's community-wide network and management structure, as a part of the National Center for Urban Partnership, also functions at the mesosystem level.

1993-94 Major Program Goals by Level

For 1993-94, Level I goals include (a) identification of national, state, and school district policies and programs as naturally occurring developments that influence changes in the schools; (b) creation of an Academy (Summer 1994) to establish and maintain articulation and transfer agreements, develop a communication network between the partner institutions, plan a faculty exchange program, and design a tracking system for partner institutions which will provide information on student transfer, retention, progress, and graduation; and (c) development and implementation of an evaluation of the partnership (governing structure, goal setting, network, coordination and management, and communication system).

At Level II, goals are (a) to improve school learning environments through strategic planning incorporating data-based decision making; (b) to use data to develop policies and plan practices associated with learning environments as cultural systems; (c) to implement staff development for professional personnel; and (d) to provide schools with resources and volunteers from the community.

The primary goal at Level III is to improve class learning environments. This goal involves

profiling class context characteristics (learning conditions, student satisfaction, and constraints) for use in planning curriculum and teaching strategies that may foster increased student identification and engagement with education. Empirical measures of student self-attributions and motivational styles are also obtained and used in planning class-level interventions.

Level IV goals emphasize improvement of academic performance, social behavior, and career awareness of students. Strategies include (a) cross-age mentoring; (b) a K-12 student connections program that opens the resources and facilities of the postsecondary institutions to K-12 students visits, offers an on-campus experience summer institute, provides college counseling and advising for students and parents, and conducts student-parent college seminars; and (c) initiatives such as a career awareness program for students and parents, implementation of the Maryland adolescent parenting program, and the Urban League's "Being a Responsible Parent" program.

MCUP Strategy for Improving Learning Environments

According to MCUP's plan, school leadership teams, MCUP committee members and administrative personnel, school district and state department of education leaders, community representatives, and university researchers will seek to accomplish several goals over a ten-year period. A major goal in 1993-94 was to field-test a plan to improve the cultural systems of school and class (Level II and III) learning environments by means of a system of empirical indicators which provide an information base for use in data-based decision making associated with strategic planning.

From a policy-making perspective, the school as a unit of change has become politically important in recent years (Heck & Mayor, 1993). Reform efforts such as restructuring, school choice, school-based decision making, use of standards and accountability, and culture building, along with efforts to study the characteristics of exemplary schools, are grounded on the belief that schools as organizational units can be altered and evaluated in terms of their characteristics and productivity. Development of systems for profiling school contextual indicators is an outgrowth of

this policy perspective (Oakes, 1986, 1989).

In MCUP, the indicator system implemented is a modified version of a data collection and reporting system developed for use in the Positive Attitudes in Tennessee Schools (PATS) Project which was initiated in 1989 (Pike & Chandler, 1989; Butler and Alberg, 1990). Within the PATS project, a learning environment is viewed as a composite of school and classroom socio-psychological factors which influence student achievement, attitudes, motivations, and conceptions of self (Stockard & Mayberry, 1985). Empirical indicators of school and class contexts are collected as perceptual information from school professional personnel and selected student grade-level cohorts. Professional personnel provide information through which overall school climate or culture dimensions are constructed (Butler, Kenney, & Huffman, 1994). Students provide perceptions of class contexts and views of themselves as learners. Three different inventories are used to generate the measures.

School-Level Contexts

Schein (1985) has suggested that "there is a possibility . . . that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture and that the unique talent of leaders is their ability to work with culture" (p. 2). Numerous contemporary scholars and education reformers (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Lane and Epps, 1992; Deal, 1993; Deal and Peterson, 1993; Firestone & Wilson, 1993; Krug, 1993; Sashkin, 1993; Sashkin and Egermeier, 1993; Sashkin & Walberg, 1993) maintain that school reform should include leadership development in which schools are viewed as organizational cultures. Central to MCUP's vision is a belief that the development and empowerment of school personnel as leaders capable of transforming school culture is essential to systemic reform of the school. This view has become a dominant perspective relative to school reform and reflects approaches currently applied within the business sector (Sashkin & Egermeier, 1993).

In summary, the fundamental premise undergirding MCUP programs and goals is that a cultural transformation is needed if the pilot schools are to provide more supportive learning

environments. MCUP provides an opportunity to plan and implement a comprehensive support system to assist leaders interested in transforming school and class cultures.

Development of Strategic Planning Model

Like most urban school systems, the Memphis City School system is a complex bureaucracy: it consists of 162 schools and about 104,000 students, its policies are comprehensive, and it is served by a strong teacher's union. However, in the summer of 1992, a new superintendent was hired who has a strong belief that decisions should be made whenever possible by those who must implement them. Consistent with this belief, under her administration decentralized decision making was introduced into school clusters of twelve schools per cluster. Each cluster is made up of elementary and secondary schools and is led by the principal of one of the cluster schools. School decisions are guided by the school improvement plan which the individual school develops and the cluster then approves, and management occurs at the school level.

In the second year of this reorganization of the school system, it became apparent that school administrators needed assistance in developing school improvement plans. At that time, the superintendent suggested that a strategic planning model was needed, along with training for school administrators in implementing the model. The timing of this need coincided with the emergence of MCUP and its emphasis upon data-driven decision making. MCUP volunteered to lead the development of a strategic planning model for the Memphis City Schools.

A preliminary team of school personnel, university personnel, and strategic planning and quality management specialists from industry (i.e., International Paper Company, Federal Express, and a private business consultant) was assembled. The team elected to use principles of strategic planning and Total Quality Management (TQM) in developing a planning model to be piloted in MCUP sites. Towards this end, the team established the following objectives:

1. Develop a plan for schools to utilize strategic planning and TQM principles in developing school improvement plans.
2. Pilot the plan in the MCUP schools in 1993-94 to help them develop school-wide plans

consistent with the goals of Memphis City Schools.
3. Utilize the lessons learned from the pilot schools to develop guidelines for all Memphis City Schools to use in developing improvement plans.

The early meetings of the preliminary strategic planning team resembled intensive training seminars on strategic planning and TQM as each member presented his/her views of strategic planning and distributed reading material for review and later discussion. Finally, the team began to agree on governing ideas to direct the process: (a) the "Learning Organization" as the vision of what the school could be; (b) "SWOT" (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) as techniques for analyzing data and establishing the school's mission, values, and priorities; and (c) "Strategic Deployment" as the technique for selecting major goals and identifying major tactics.

After the strategic planning model was developed, the team developed training materials and the following steps for implementation:

1. Visit schools and talk with administrators	Team members	2 hours
2. Overview of Entire Process for Schools a. Welcome and orientation b. The "Learning Organization" c. Mission and Values d. Strategy Deployment e. Selecting a Planning Team f. Assignments	Principals	1/2 day
3. Develop SWOT's, Vision and Mission	Individual school teams*	1 day
4. Strategy Deployment Process a. Objectives Set b. Priorities Established c. Measures Identified d. Resources Planned e. Assignments Made f. Time Table Established	Individual school teams*	2 days
5. Develop Action Plans	Individual school teams	4 weeks
6. Review Action Plans	Individual school teams*	1/2 day
7. Submit Action Plans to Cluster for Approval	Individual schools	?

8. Implement Plans	Individual schools	When needed
9. Evaluate Planning Process	Entire Group	05/94
10. Evaluate Results	Entire Group	12/94
11. Refine Model, Training Materials and Steps for Implementation	Team members	01/95
12. Disseminate/Transfer to Remaining Schools	Cluster leaders	01/95

* Moderated by a member of the preliminary strategic planning team

Sessions with individual school planning teams are moderated by a member of the preliminary strategic planning team and held at a site other than the school. The school system provides substitutes so that teachers can participate, community representatives and parents have made arrangements to miss work, and MCUP pays expenses for the sessions. Steps 1-5 were completed in April and May 1994.

Conclusion

MCUP has created a bold vision of school reform to enhance the educational development of urban learners and foster higher educational aspirations. The plan -- conceptually grounded on an ecological model and guided by the belief that community resources must be mobilized to support school restructuring efforts -- is data driven. Also incorporated into the restructuring effort are training and leadership development opportunities and a monitoring and periodic assessment system. The partnership, however, acknowledges that motivations and responses in the school sites will determine what changes will ultimately impact learners and their development. MCUP's commitment is to the school's ability to reform itself and to the assurance that the appropriate and available resources of the Memphis community are made available to the schools as they seek to realize their vision.

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